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ART. I.—THEOLOGY AS A HELP TOWARDS
CHRISTIAN UNITY.

I.

THEOLOGY AT A TURNING POINT.

THEOLOGY has not always been a help towards Christian unity. Indeed, from this point of view, theology has had rather a bad reputation; it has often been more an obstacle than a help; it has often been used for maintaining dissensions and controversies. There is plenty of justification for unkind words about theological quarrels, and without doubt theology has much on its conscience. Nevertheless the reproaches about theological quarrels have not always been fair. Sometimes, where at first sight we get an impression only of tiresome quarrels, theology has in fact been fighting a hard battle to preserve Christianity itself, in conflict with forces that threatened to dissolve away and to destroy Christian faith. If that be the case, theology has thereby done a great work also for Christian unity.

If therefore an investigation of history shows not only that theology has often been responsible for maintaining and even sharpening divisions in Christendom, but also that it has evident potentialities for producing the opposite effect, it is necessary for us to try to find out the reasons for these different results of theological work, and especially under what conditions and in what ways theology can render services to Christian unity.

Before trying to answer these questions I ought perhaps to say a word about the relation of theology to the forces that nowadays are working in favour of a growing Christian unity. There are various such forces or motives to be found. One such motive is the general religious situation in our time. Christianity is living under hard stress. Strong brutal forces, acting more or less as substitutes for religion, are fighting against Christianity and persecuting it all over the world. The situation is very much of the same kind as it was in the first centuries of the Church's life. In such a situation the weakness caused by divisions is more dangerous and disastrous than ever. We cannot but feel that a hard necessity stands behind and promotes the endeavours for a stronger Christian unity.

Another motive we find in Christian missions all over the world. The reasons are obvious, and I need not here give any detailed exposition of them. Everybody understands how it must damage the effectiveness of Christianity, when different Christian denominations are working in disunion, perhaps even in opposition to one another. It is a well-known fact that Christian missions have had the greatest importance in the endeavours towards Christian unity ever since the World Conference of Christian Missions had its memorable beginning at Edinburgh in 1910.

I have mentioned two important motives for Christian unity. If we may distinguish between external and internal motives, the motives we have mentioned may be called external. They have their basis in the present situation of the world. But more important certainly is the internal motive that lies in the Christian Gospel itself. The Christian message is indeed one quite definite and fixed message. We have one Lord, and we can never forget his prayer for the unity of his Church. All other motives, of whatever kind they be, receive their strength from this internal motive.

Now theology ought not to be described as a motive for Christian unity. It ought rather to be described as an instrument of help. As such it is in fact indispensable. None of the

motives here mentioned can be effective without help from the side of theology. Even if Christian unity could be confined only to unity in practical work, such a unity could not be realised without the help of theology. But Christian unity is primarily a unity of faith. That being the case, the help of theology is more than ever indispensable. That does not at all mean that Christian unity should be merely a unity in theological formulae. The importance of theology ought neither to be over-estimated nor under-estimated. It would be over-estimated if we did not make a clear distinction between faith and theological formulae. It would be under-estimated if we were to neglect the help that theology can give for understanding the Christian message as the basis of faith.

Now, if it is true, as it certainly is, that far from having been a help to unity, theology has often aggravated the divisions of Christendom, then our first duty must be to find why and under what conditions theology has been producing this effect. To get the necessary facts clear in our minds, it may be well to consider the theological situation in the last centuries. Surveying the history of theology from the time after the Reformation until about 1900, we can distinguish between two main periods. The first is the period of Protestant scholasticism; the second, beginning with the Enlightenment and going on throughout the nineteenth century, is characterized chiefly by the humanizing theology of the liberal schools that dominated the situation. The background of the first of these periods was the divisions created by the Reformation. Theology was cramped and confined by these divisions. It had lost its oecumenical outlook. The confessions of the different denominations were fundamentally considered as separate confessions. And the main task of theology was to uphold and defend these separate confessions and their theological formulae. Theology was in fact tied up to the existing differences, and it attacked from this standpoint the confessions of other Churches. That means that theology, according to its own idea of itself, was a theology of divisions. Oecumenicity was outside the scope of its ideas—for you will

not consider as an oecumenical tendency the effort to demonstrate the wrongness of others, as opposed to the ideal form of Christianity which the theologian himself represents.

In the second (or liberal) period the situation had changed very much, and it might at first sight appear that theology really had got a more oecumenical outlook and quality. In any case theology now was not concerned with particular religious views; its interests were primarily directed towards religious generalities, namely towards a rational and universal religiousness. But in fact this attitude was as far as possible from being oecumenical. It was not able to strengthen Christian unity; on the contrary it promoted new divisions in Christendom. There are two kinds of divisions in Christendom: one between the different churches, and also another that does not coincide with the borders of different denominations but that performs its separatist work independently of these borders. The divisions now mentioned belong to the second type.

What is now the reason for this divisive influence of theology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? It is not difficult to find the answer. The main reason was obviously the combination of properly Christian ideas with ideas of a different religious kind, with a general religious idealism, that in many respects was not only different from but also opposed to Christian faith. This work certainly was directed by the best intentions, to interpret Christianity in an acceptable way to the contemporary intellectual world. But the result was confusion; the interpreters believed themselves capable of finding their own more or less modern ideas in the Gospel, and therefore the authentically Christian ideas became transformed and deeply changed. Now it was inevitable that such endeavours should arouse opposition. But the opposition was mostly scholastic and extremely doctrinaire in its outlook, and not able to find the true religious motives behind the formulae. For this reason the rivalry and the discussions between the two opponents were more unproductive than they ought to have been. It is true indeed that the nineteenth century has in many

ways enriched our knowledge through its investigations of religion. Nevertheless it cannot be denied that there is a deep tragedy in the situation, because of the incapacity of both the contending powers to work out the deepest Christian problems. The inevitable result was that the divisions of Christendom increased; its disunion has perhaps never been so deep as in the last century, nor has there ever been so alarming an uncertainty about the nature of the Christian message itself.

We have raised the question: what is it that has prevented theology from being a help towards Christian unity? Our survey of the history of the last centuries has given us two answers. First: theology is unable to give such help, when according to its own idea of itself it is only a theology of division and therefore lives in an atmosphere of self-content. Secondly: theology will again be unable to render that help when it has not a keen eye for the genuine Christian message, when it is uncertain about the real essence of Christianity.

It may seem that our survey hitherto has only confirmed the bad reputation of theology, and shown that it would not be reasonable to expect any help from theology for the cause of Christian unity. Nevertheless such a conclusion would certainly be wrong. First, it may be observed that we have deliberately looked only for those points which might show how and why theology had been an obstacle to Christian unity. There are also other points to be found that are more favourable. Further the theological situation has changed very much since the last century. In fact we have, as far as I can see, entered into a new period of the history of theology, no less different from the period of Protestant scholasticism than from the period of Liberal or humanizing theology. That does not mean that this newer theology always stands out firmly and clearly, much less that disagreements about theological questions have now disappeared. Certainly we have nowadays, as at all times, many different theological schools. Nevertheless I venture to say that there are certain dominating tendencies which can easily be observed in contemporary theology, and that these tendencies are very important not least for the ques-

tion of the relations between theology and the endeavours for Christian unity. In what follows I will try to throw some light upon the changes that have occurred in recent theology. But before doing so I think I must first say some words about the oecumenical possibilities of theology considered from the point of view of principle.

We have seen that theology has often been an obstacle to Christian unity. But in these instances theology has failed to realize aright its own purpose. A theology that really understands its purpose will always have an oecumenical outlook. To verify this statement, it is sufficient to recognize what from a scientific point of view must be demanded from theology. Two main duties ought to be emphasized. The first duty is this: the purpose of theology is in the first place to explain what Christianity really means, to explain as carefully as possible the authentic character and essence of Christianity. It is a clear scientific claim: theology has to understand its object, which is Christianity. The attitude of theology is not to consider itself as an instrument useful for certain practical purposes, not even if that purpose be Christian unity. All its interest must be directed towards its scientific aim: to understand what Christianity means. Only when theology works not for the sake of being a help for some purpose or other, but only for the sake of strictly prosecuting its own scientific aim, will it be able to give help to the endeavours towards Christian unity. In fact, it *must* then be a help towards unity, because a theology which sees its purpose as the understanding of what Christianity really means cannot pursue its task without having an universal outlook. The more objective theology is in its scientific work, the more its power to give help will grow.

It would perhaps be well to illustrate these statements with some words about the relation of theology to the various denominations or confessions. If the purpose of theology is no other than to set forth the authentic character and essence of Christianity, then it is no longer possible to consider a Christian confession only as a separate confession, that must

be defended and proved to be right. It is further obvious that a Christian confession must intend to express something that is considered as essential for Christianity. If a confession has not this character, it has no Christian character at all. The rightfulness of a confession therefore must depend upon its power to express that which essentially belongs to Christianity. The individual confession does not exist only for the sake of maintaining itself as a separate confession among other separate confessions; its purpose must be to emphasize some essential Christian point of view, that has perhaps been suppressed or obscured. If it can be demonstrated that a confession really has such a character, its rightfulness is thereby demonstrated. But even if theology may so recognize the character of some particular confession, it must never lose its universal and oecumenical outlook. This universal outlook must be inseparable from theology.

Now I am come to the second duty of theology. When theology is trying to explain what Christianity means, it cannot limit itself to theological formulae; it must go behind the letter of the formulae, and look for the religious motives and intentions which seek to express themselves in the formulae. This duty of theology also is a plain scientific duty, and is in fact included in the duty first mentioned; for obviously theology has not explained the essence of Christianity satisfactorily, if it has not gone back to and unveiled the ultimate motives and intentions, the *spirit* of Christianity. This work of theology also has the greatest importance as a help towards Christian unity. It will again and again appear how while the formulae appear to divide, the deeper religious motives and intentions are able to transcend the divisions and promote a growing understanding and unity.

Now there certainly is much more to be said about the work of theology for promoting understanding and unity. Thus, it is obviously an important task of theology not only to dispel misunderstandings, but also to bring to light the underlying differences as clearly as possible and not to cover them over with ambiguous words. But such tasks as well as all its

other tasks are included in the already mentioned duty of theology, the plain scientific duty of explaining as distinctly as possible what Christianity really means. In so far as this duty is faithfully carried out, theology will certainly render important services to Christian unity; in so far as it is neglected, theology will not give any help at all, but will only increase the confusion and the divisions.

But it is time to leave these general remarks and go back to the question about the changes that have appeared in recent theology and that signify a new theological period.

Here I will especially call attention to the theological attitude to the Bible and to the christological dogma inherited from the undivided Church. It is important to consider just these two questions, because we have here our common Christian heritage and our primary basis of Christian unity.

As regards the attitude to the Bible, I think we have full reason to speak of a new period. In the scholastic period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Bible was considered as *a unity without variety*. All the contents of the Bible were considered as being in the same way and on the same level an infallible divine word. That seemed to be a very strong position, and to lay a firm foundation for Christian unity. But in fact it was not so. Two points must be noticed. First: because of the lack of a truly historical view, the Bible was to a large extent interpreted in a doctrinaire way, so that it was easy for everybody to find verifications of his own doctrine. Secondly: the position was not so strong as it seemed, because it did not correspond with the fact; the unity of the Bible is not in fact of this kind.

The next period is the period of historical investigation in its first phase, i.e. roughly the liberal period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This period may be characterized by the phrase: *varieties without unity*. We ought not, indeed, to underestimate the work that was done in this period. It was of great importance that we then got a new and fresh view of

the Bible, and that we learned to see differences in its contents. The critical investigations rendered the greatest service to our knowledge of the history of religion. Nevertheless the first phase of these historical investigations led undoubtedly also to great difficulties not least with regard to Christian unity. It would seem as if the Bible would be split up not only in varieties but also in irreconcilable contradictions. If we look back at the situation of the end of the last century, we see the result of this development. The result was a widespread uncertainty concerning the nature of the Christian message. Especially the difference between the teaching of Jesus himself and the teaching of his apostles was strongly emphasized, so strongly in fact, that it seemed to be a case of two different religions. Theology then appeared as a force that threatened Christianity with a dissolution from within.

Our own age no longer considers those theories as reliable. Their day is past. They have been shown to be false by a more thorough historical investigation. It has now been demonstrated that what was then supposed to be the teaching of Jesus was a construction very different from the reality itself. The fault in this construction was that the interpreters were not critical enough. They innocently rediscovered many of their own modern ideas in the narratives of the Gospels about the teaching of Jesus. As soon as the narratives were examined afresh, this pre-conception having been set aside, it was obvious that the teaching of Jesus had a quite different character, and also that there was a clear continuity between his teaching and that of his apostles. The apostles did not invent a new religion with Christ as its centre—as far as we can go back to the teaching of Jesus himself, we find that his message is inseparably connected with his own person.

The statements which I have just made may be considered as signs of a new theological period. Historical investigation has now reached a second stage. It can be characterized with the phrase: *unity in variety*. Certainly theology has as keen an eye as before for the varieties in the Bible. It knows very

well that for instance St. Matthew does not write in the same way as St. John, and St. John not in the same way as St. Paul. There are undeniably differences within the New Testament. Nevertheless the dominant tendency of theology is very strongly to emphasize the unity of the Christian message. There is only one message. The "kerygma" of the New Testament is substantially the same in the Gospels as in the apostolic epistles; it is one whole, and it is quite definite. In spite of all the differences, the New Testament stands out as an extraordinarily firm unity with *Christos-Kyrios* as its centre. When Christianity first appeared in the world it was not an ambiguous, vague, uncertain thing that could be interpreted in quite opposite ways; it was a message so fixed and solid that it could not be altered without the destruction of Christianity itself. When the Church was built up on the fact of the Resurrection, on the fact of Christ as victorious over the powers of evil, it was thereby built up on the foundation that was laid by Jesus himself. The apostles knew very well that no other foundation can be laid. They carried on his work; or rather, he through them carried on his own work.

Now it is obvious that the change in the theological outlook that we here have observed must have the greatest importance for the question of Christian unity. If from the very beginning there had been a rift in Christianity, if it had contained from the beginning not merely ideas with more than one side to them, but also manifest contradictions, then there would have been in Christianity from the start such a seed of disunion that all endeavours to realize a Christian unity must be futile. But there can be no greater help to the endeavours towards unity than the known fact of the unity and solidity of the original Christian message. The theological investigations of which I have spoken are still in an early stage. There will be much more work to do. But there can be no mistake about the tendency of the investigations now going on. I think we have every right to consider these tendencies as hopeful. In so far as theology applies itself more and more and with grow-

ing clearness to set forth the original Christian message in all its fullness, it certainly will give help towards Christian unity.

If we now turn to the dogma of the undivided Church, the situation is very much the same. Here too we find that a remarkable change has taken place. Where once the christological dogma was regarded more or less as a deviation or even an apostasy from true Christianity, theology now recognizes it as a stronghold of Christian belief in a period that threatened to overwhelm Christianity with syncretistic ideas of different kinds.

The faith of the New Testament was primarily a faith in the resurrection; the faith of the early Church was primarily a faith in the incarnation. These last centuries have been filled with controversies about the christological dogma of the undivided Church. It is not exactly edifying to look back at these controversies. The assailants who pleaded for a Christianity without dogma had indeed very little understanding of the real meaning of the Christian faith. They tried to undermine the position of the early Church by maintaining that the dogma was a result of Hellenistic influences, and emphasized very strongly the "naturalizing" and "intellectualizing" of Christianity that was supposed to have taken place through the dogma. It was considered as a main task for theology to purify Christianity by removing these foreign influences and returning to the supposed simple teaching of Jesus. On the other side the defenders of the dogma usually did not very deeply understand its religious purport and intention. They considered the dogma for the most part as a series of metaphysical statements. Such being the case, the discussion could not be very helpful; we have here another instance of the tragedy of the theological situation of the last century.

It is very important that investigations into the dogma of the early Church should not stop at the formulae as such, but find the way to their deep motives and intentions. As soon as these motives were discovered it could no longer be denied that the dogma represented the self-defence of Christianity against

the foreign forces that threatened to penetrate it and dissolve it from within. In fact the dogma was the firm safeguard and the impregnable fortress of Christianity. It was at the same time an expression of the original "kerygma"; its continuity with the confession of the New Testament was indeed as clear as it well could be.

It is clear that this change of theological outlook is of great importance for the problem of unity. The Bible and the tradition of the undivided Church do not stand against each other as opposed forces; on the contrary they make a continuity that must be of decisive importance for the subsequent history. Because of this continuity, there exists also a theological foundation for Christian unity that has been laid once for all. That is not indeed to say that it is possible or even desirable to reach a theological uniformity as a basis of unity. From this point of view the situation of the New Testament may be considered as a prototype of what ought to be, since there we find a unity in variety. The variety has its place, as well as the unity. The variety tells us that it is not necessary that we all think in quite the same way about all theological questions—even the apostles and the evangelists did not. There is a variety that is no obstacle at all to the unity which has its strength in the definite unchangeable message of Christianity. At the same time it is right to speak of a theological foundation of Christian unity, constituted by the continuity of the Bible and the undivided Church, and constitutive for all Christianity that is conscious of its own quality.

In the subsequent history of the Church many questions have been raised that have led to divisions in Christendom. I do not mean to say that these questions can be solved, for the sake of Christian unity, only by going back to the continuity which is to be found in the early Church. In any case this continuity is not to be considered as a codex, from which fixed and definite theological answers might be read out. Such a view would not do justice to the importance of the subsequent history itself, and to the lessons that Christendom has learned

and has to learn through this history. Above all it would not do to jump over this complicated history of Christendom, and pretend that it could be considered as a "quantité négligeable." Nevertheless not only the Bible but also the tradition of the undivided Church, in so far as it is the legitimate continuation of the original message, certainly represent a theological foundation of decisive importance also for all the subsequent history of Christianity. Even if it is not possible for us to find in it definitive answers for all questions raised in later times, it is an absolute claim that the answers which are given shall uphold their harmony and continuity with the general idea that is contained in the original continuity.

In the second lecture we will look from this point of view at the three main problems raised in the divisions of Christendom, and try to see what services theology is capable of rendering to the cause of Christian unity.

II.

THEOLOGY AND THE MAIN QUESTIONS OF THE DIVISIONS IN CHRISTENDOM.

When we survey the history of Christendom in the last thousand years from the point of view of its divisions, we find that there are three phenomena that especially call for our attention: the separation between East and West; the divisions that had their origin in the Reformation; and the further spread of divisions in the centuries after the Reformation. As regards the separation between East and West, the facts that were the immediate cause of the cleavage seem to be, on the theological side, of minor importance. But certainly there were deeper questions lying behind; and the deepest question, from a theological point of view, was the question about Christ and his work. At the time of the Reformation the main matter in dispute obviously was the way of salvation. When we come to the last centuries the situation is very complicated. There are different causes of division and disintegration, some of which

have already been mentioned in the first lecture. Nevertheless it would not be wrong to say that the work of disintegration in that period is primarily connected with the disintegration of the idea of the Church; in any case it is obvious that the divisions of this period have their origin to a large extent in different views of the Church.

Therefore, when we consider the possibility of theology being a help towards Christian unity, the character of the divisions leads us first to examine the three questions just mentioned: Christ and his work, Salvation, and the Church. If the Christian message can be defined as Salvation through Christ in his Church, it is evident that the divisions concern the most vital questions of Christianity.

1. EAST AND WEST: CHRIST AND HIS WORK.

The Incarnation was the centre of the faith of the undivided Church. The primary point of emphasis was the coming of God into the world of humanity, the self-communication and the active presence of God himself. The christology vindicates as intensely as possible the belief that we meet in Christ not a being standing between God and man, half God and half man, not a being lower than God, but the essential divinity, God himself. But at the same time Christ is not a theophany. He is our brother, as truly man as we. His manhood is a real manhood. These two points of view the Chalcedonian confession unites in its famous formula about the two natures of Christ. It does not try to explain *how* the relations between the divine and the human elements ought to be thought of. It only proclaims this paradoxical synthesis.

Now this confession of faith in Christ evidently has its consequences for the idea of the redemption. Or rather: there is a special conception of redemption involved in this christological confession. In fact, this confession of faith tells us not only that the salvation of man has its ultimate basis in the will of God, but also that it is realised through the

activity of God himself, through the coming of God into the world of sin and death, and through his conquering and destroying all that which separates man from himself. As Irenaeus said: the incarnation took place "ut occideret peccatum, evacuaret mortem et vivificaret hominem"—that he might slay sin, destroy death, and raise man to life. With regard to the work of Christ, this view of redemption includes two main points. The first is the activity of God himself in the work of Christ, a conception which finds pregnant expression in the words of St. Paul: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." The second point is the indissoluble connection between the cross and the resurrection. It is impossible to isolate the sacrifice on the cross. The importance of the cross can only be realised in the light of the resurrection. The work of Christ is at once a sacrificial and a victorious work; the cross is not only a sacrifice but also a victory. And the work whereby the living victorious Christ realises his victory throughout the ages is also a sacrificial work.

Now the Church has not always succeeded in holding fast to this view of the work of Christ, which although formally doublesided has a strong and homogeneous character. As is well known, there have been opposite tendencies in East and West. In the East we find sometimes an evident tendency to interpret the incarnation in a way that threatened the reality of Christ's humanity and that led men's thoughts in the direction of docetism and monophysitism. On the other side the West emphasised very strongly the humanity of Christ in a way that deeply influenced the religious thought of this part of Christendom and largely determined the character of mediaeval Christianity. If this be so, we have good reason for paying special attention to the situation in the West.

The change of view which we have mentioned did not consist in any opposition to the christological belief of the early Church: the theology of the Middle Ages was thoroughly loyal to this confession of belief. The transformations that occurred were not made in the confession itself but in spite of

it. A visible sign of the change is to be found in the fact that the triumph-crucifix of the earlier period more and more gave way to the crucifix that represented the martyr and sufferer. The devotional literature had its centre in the idea of "imitatio Christi," loving compassion with the sufferings of Christ. The same development is to be seen in the dominant theory about the atonement, which very strongly emphasised the satisfaction that was given to God through the sacrifice of Christ as man, *qua homo*. The influence of these changes was particularly important in its bearing on eucharistic practice, where the thought of Christ being sacrificed anew on behalf of man's need was prominent, and the idea of the holy eucharist as a communion tended to fade away.

Nobody can deny that we are here touching questions that have given birth to deep divisions in Christendom. But at the same time it does seem possible that a theology that examined these questions free from prejudices would be a help towards unity. Such a theological investigation must first say, that no objection can be made against the emphasis on the humanity of Christ in itself: this point certainly is wholly legitimate. Further, theology can make two statements of importance for a solution of the problem, the first about the atonement and the second about the meaning of the word sacrifice.

As regards the atonement we must remember that no one theory has been officially authorised in Christendom. The reality is in fact far too rich to be captured by one theory. In itself there can be no objection to the thought of the work of Christ as a satisfaction, received by God; this idea certainly is to be found in the New Testament. But at the same time this idea must be held in conjunction with the central Christian belief in the Incarnation of our Lord, and therefore also with the idea of God himself working in Christ. If this conjunction is not maintained, then—if I can be allowed to speak in musical terms—we shall be reading the story of the atonement with a wrong key-signature. We shall be forgetting, that the Christian God of Love is not only a God who receives sacrifice

from man, but also first of all a God who himself makes the sacrifice, and that the work of Christ must be seen from this point of view, if its real meaning as well as its victorious power is to appear.

We have already touched the second question, the question about the meaning of sacrifice. I have here the pleasure of referring to the excellent book "The Fullness of Sacrifice," which the Bishop of Lincoln has written. He shows us that many difficulties and contradictions concerning not only the Eucharist but also the work of Christ as a whole spring from the fact that, especially from the Middle Ages, the act of sacrifice has commonly been identified exclusively with the immolation of the victim; and he shows how a richer interpretation of sacrifice, where all its Christian fullness is maintained, leads to the removal of many of the difficulties. It is not possible for me here to go into details. I would only mention this book as a testimony that theology, if it goes forwards without prejudices, can be a help towards unity and reconciliation.

In our own time East and West have met each other as they have not done for centuries. They have met both personally and theologically. Undoubtedly this meeting has been favourable for the oecumenical outlook. It is not for me to guess what the East may possibly have learned from the western theologians. But the emphasis that the theology of the East from the very beginning has laid upon the resurrection of Christ as the sign of the divine victory has something to say also to western theology today. It will remind us that we never understand the real sense of the Cross, if we do not look at it from the point of view of the victory of the divine Love over the powers of death and the enemies of God. If it does this, it certainly will help us to find the deeper meaning of the sacrifice of our Lord also, and to remove misunderstandings that have separated us in the past.

2. THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION AND THE REFORMATION.

I come to the Reformation. I think that I can speak of this remarkable period of division in the history of Christendom with great confidence, and, I will add, with greater confidence now than was possible even some few years ago. The experiences of the oecumenical conference in Edinburgh 1937 have been encouraging. The result of the conference showed that it was not impossible to speak about the main subject of the Reformation in a way that need not be separating but can be uniting. The report of the first section about "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," which was accepted by the conference, declared "that there is in connection with the subject committed to our Section no ground for maintaining divisions between Churches." Now the report, in its statements about the doctrine of grace, certainly gives a clear expression of the main idea of the Reformation.

It is not my intention to defend all the statements of the Reformation. Many of them obviously were sharpened by the historical situation; in some cases they have nowadays only historical interest. Neither should I like to act as a judge deciding how to divide the guilt of the schism between Rome and the reformers. The only question that from an oecumenical point of view really matters is the question whether the main idea of the Reformation represents only a particularity belonging to a certain part of Christendom, or represents something that is constitutive for Christianity and that cannot be suppressed without obscuring and injuring the Christian message. Other questions about the Reformation may have their interest, but are all of secondary importance compared with this.

The message of the Reformation has been the object of many misunderstandings in the past and also to-day, and even within the Churches of the Reformation. These misunderstandings may partly be explained by the intensity with

the message of the Reformation was originally proclaimed; but their main reason is certainly to be found in many narrow-minded interpretations of this message throughout the centuries. Thus it is often supposed that the Reformation failed to lay due weight on the activity of man, and that its emphasis upon "justification through faith alone" suppresses the ethical view of Christianity as well as the importance of sanctification. However, a thorough investigation shows without any doubt that these suppositions are only misunderstandings. In itself the main idea of the Reformation could not be clearer than it is. If we go to the religious motive behind the formula "justification through faith alone," it is evident that its real sense is nothing else than salvation through the Love of God alone. Rightly understood the word faith used in this connection says simply that the basis of the salvation of man is the Love of God, working through Christ, and that there exists no other basis. Certainly this view does not weaken the importance either of sanctification or of activity in service. The Love that gives is also the Love that claims; and more than that, it is the Love that compels to self-sacrificing service and gives strength for it.

The statements of the world conference in Edinburgh about "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" testified very clearly, that the conference, in which Churches that are not heirs of the Reformation also took part, considered the main idea of the Reformation not as a peculiarity of some Christians but a universal and vital Christian idea, inseparable from the authentic Christian message. I need only refer to two sentences in the acts of the conference. The first is this: "Man's salvation and welfare have their source in God alone, who is moved to His gracious activity towards man not by any merit on man's part, but solely by His free, out-going love." The second sentence runs thus: "Whatever our growth in holiness may be, our fellowship with God is always based upon God's forgiving grace." The first sentence emphasises what undoubtedly was the main interest of the Reformation, and the second illuminates its content from a very important point of

view. The tendency of this second sentence is to lay stress upon Christian humility. The Christian life is necessarily, so long as it lasts on earth, a conflict against the powers of evil, a fight for holiness. In this conflict man never has any reason for boasting of his own work. He will never reach a stage where his Christian life is based on his own efforts. For all victories that can be gained he will always need to be humble before God and thankful for His "forgiving grace."

When looking back at the proceedings of the conference at Edinburgh I think it difficult to doubt that theology can be a help towards Christian unity. It was in fact a help even concerning questions that have been matters of controversy for centuries. If the message of the Reformation was a genuine and vital Christian message, it was a message not only for a certain time in history, but also for all times. It is evident that its appearance has its own characteristic background in history; but the message of salvation through the Love of God alone is not to be considered as a theological theory among other theological theories, but rather as a watch-word, a signal, to which we have to listen in all times, not least in our own. Certainly it cannot be hidden from us, that the present time is full of substitutes for religion, that will not have anything to do with humility before God but are occupied with the self-glorification of man and of the race. In such a religious situation, when Christianity once more has to fight as hard a battle as it has ever had for its very existence, the clear message of salvation through the Love of God alone and of man's need of humility has certainly not lost its importance.

3. THE IDEA OF THE CHURCH IN THE LAST CENTURIES.

For the whole movement towards Christian unity it is of course inevitable that the problem of the Church and its nature must be a dominant question. This question is emphasised by the actual situation of Christendom, by the existence of all our different church bodies in Christendom. It is obvious that the disunion of Christendom in the last cen-

turies has been very much aggravated through the weakness of the idea of the Church in this period, through the lack of a strong consciousness of the importance of the Church and the lack of a clear ecumenical outlook. When considering this situation and the possibilities of the present time from a theological point of view, the question arises whether theology here can be of any help, whether the theological situation of to-day can be regarded as favourable for promoting a growing appreciation of the Church and a clearer understanding of its real nature. I am glad to say that the answer, as far as I can see, certainly must be in the affirmative. It is my conviction that here also we have passed a theological turning-point, that the individualistic outlook of an earlier day has yielded place to a deeper understanding of what fellowship means in Christian life.

Before I try to describe the change here indicated I will only make one short remark as regards the subject that will be treated. It is not my intention directly to bring up for consideration the question of Church organization. We all know that these problems are very complicated. At the same time it is evident that the starting-point for considering such questions must be a view, based on sound principles, of the nature of the Church. At the same time it needs to be observed in passing that the organizations of the different church bodies do not simply coincide with the confessional differences. So for instance the organization of the Church of Sweden is very different from the organization of the "protestant" Church of Germany or of the "lutheran" churches in the United States of America.

Going back to the history of the idea of the Church, I should first like to emphasise that the weakening of this idea and the subsequent disunion are a phenomenon specially characteristic of these last centuries. There are, I think, reasons for emphasising this fact. In many quarters it has become more or less a tradition to contrast the "catholic" and the "protestant" views and to consider the Reformation as the

origin of the individualism that has disintegrated the idea of the Church. Now it is of course not to be denied that in later protestantism, especially from the time of the eighteenth century, we find very much of this disintegrating individualism. Nevertheless it cannot be rightly maintained before the judgement of history that the Reformation, as such, represents a disintegration of the idea of the Church, or that it ought to be considered, from this point of view, as individualistic in its outlook. Nothing could be further from Luther himself than a tendency to weaken the importance of the Church. The Church is, as he says, the mother that bears and nourishes every Christian. Nor would it be possible to hold, that for instance the Church as it existed in Sweden in the seventeenth century should be characterised as lacking in understanding of its own quality and importance. It needs also to be observed that there existed strong individualistic tendencies already in the Middle Ages, and that such tendencies are to be found in the age of the Reformation, often in strong opposition to the Reformation itself.

But it is not possible here to examine the origins and the developments of the individualistic movements in Christendom. Let me only state that the really important turning-point ought to be fixed somewhere about the year 1700, and that it is the period since this time that has been penetrated by obviously individualistic tendencies. They certainly have had their origin from various causes, but these have all exercised a disintegrating influence on the idea of the Church.

To remove misunderstandings, it ought also to be said that "individualism" here does not mean the emphasis upon the personal character of Christianity and upon the religious responsibility of man. If that is to be called individualism, Christianity in itself is individualistic. By "individualism" we mean a conception that considers the individual as primary in relation to the church-fellowship, so that the Church is apprehended as a kind of union of individual Christians who have had the same or at least very similar religious experiences.

There is no doubt that such ideas have been very powerful in the last few centuries and exercised wide influence in the old historic Churches as well as in those whose origin is relatively recent. These ideas stand strongly opposed not only to the legalistic conception of the Church, but also to every organic view of the Church, such as Luther's, for which the Church is the mother of every Christian. Those who held these individualistic views appealed to the New Testament as an authority that confirmed them, and believed that the primitive Church held very much the same ideas, and was separated by a great gulf from the subsequent development in the next centuries. The consequence was that the existing historic churches must be disregarded, as being caricatures of what a church ought to be. Now it must certainly be admitted that their criticisms of the existing churches often hit weak points, and also that much zeal and religious intensity could be found in the movements here mentioned. To this extent these movements certainly made a contribution to the Christian life which must not be under-estimated. At the same time it is evident that these views of the relations between the Church and the individual inevitably led both to a disintegration of the idea of the Church, and to growing dissensions. That individualism included a seed of disunion. When the Church is not considered primarily as a creation of the grace of God, but human experiences are taken to be the ground of the Church, such a result is inevitable. As soon as the experiences of different groups are found to be different from one another, new divisions must take place. The history of religion in the last centuries gives us many evidences of this fact.

In our day it is obvious that the tendencies here mentioned no longer have the same power. We have, as I have already ventured to say, passed a turning-point. The change of outlook may partly be connected with changes in the general view of the relation between society and the individual. But primarily the change that has taken place must be considered as a self-defence of the idea of the Church in a difficult period when Christianity has to fight for its very existence, and when

nothing can be more necessary from the Christian point of view than that the Church should be firm, strong and free, with a clear consciousness of what it really stands for.

Here we come back to the question about the power of theology to give help in the new situation. Of the first importance here is the new period on which the historical investigation of the Bible has entered, which I described in my first lecture with the words: *unity in variety*. The dominating tendency is, as we remember, strongly to emphasize the unity of the "kerygma" of the New Testament, the message that has its centre in *Christos-Kyrios*. We may equally well say that the gospel-message has its centre in the Church, because *Christos-Kyrios* and the Church cannot be separated from one another. The time has passed when the idea of the Church in the New Testament could be disregarded as only of secondary importance, and when it could be interpreted from an individualistic point of view. On the contrary, it is evident that when Christianity first appeared, it appeared as the Church, having the strongest consciousness of the importance of the Church and its universality. Modern investigations demonstrate that the individualistic theories which an earlier period sought to find in the Bible are quite unknown to the New Testament, and that such an interpretation was a misinterpretation only to be explained by the fact that the interpreters were tied and bound by their own notions.

To be a Christian is, for the New Testament, to be a member of the Church, to be joined in a new community, to have a share in a new "koinonia", a new communion. The Church is the body of Christ. This word, the body of Christ, is not to be considered only as figurative. The body of Christ is for the New Testament a concrete, living reality. The living Christ is in a very real and concrete way working in his Church through his Word, his Sacraments and his Love. The Church is a visible revelation of the invisible Lord, a continued incarnation of Christ on earth. He is himself the head of the Church, the source from which power is derived, that leads, governs and

holds the whole together. As such the Church is a heavenly organism, but at the same time perceptible and visible on earth, existing on the border between two worlds, having a quality that transcends each present age of history.

The Church of the New Testament is one, because it has one Lord. It is holy, not because of any unstained personal holiness of its members, but because in it the holy Spirit of our Lord performs his sanctifying work. The Church is catholic or universal, because its "koinonia" is meant to be a communion for all the world. Finally it is apostolic. The last note of the Church ought to be especially emphasized since its importance was much overlooked by the theology of an earlier period. The leading position of the apostles in the Church of the New Testament had its ground in the commission given to them by the Lord. As apostles they had to represent by proxy their Lord in the Church. So far the Church was built on the foundation of the apostles. Their order certainly was of the first importance in the Church. They had the responsibility of the commission that had been given to them by the Lord himself in the days of his earthly life. True, the idea of the Church developed as a result of Easter and Pentecost, but it was being prepared already in the Galilean ministry, and so far the idea of the Church was to be found in germ already in the thoughts and words of Jesus himself.

I have now tried to describe shortly the view of the Church in the New Testament that has been made clear for us by the theology of our own time. It has at least for many of us been a rediscovery of thoughts and ideas that had been for a long time forgotten. Theology is of course still busy with its work of exploration. But already the idea of the Church of the Bible stands out for us in its great strength, its realistic and universal outlook, able to inspire our own thoughts.

For every movement towards Christian unity the question about the nature of the Church and about the relations between the different church bodies must be an urgent problem. The

proceedings at the conference in Edinburgh showed how great the difficulties are. Certainly we have a long way to go before these difficulties are removed. But it is my conviction that the further discussions will not be in vain, and also that a theology that plunges itself deeper into the thoughts of the New Testament and learns to see them as they really were will give great help; it will strengthen the Church's consciousness of itself, and will dissipate theories that are based on shallow and unrealistic ideas of the nature of the Church. There are, so far as I can see, two things that have chiefly injured the idea of the Church. The first is the narrow legalistic outlook which treats the Church as an ecclesiastical system governed by canon-law. The result of this is a rigidity which in fact is alien to the nature of the Church, and therefore inevitably provokes resistance. The second danger is the individualism of which I have spoken already, which dissolves away and disintegrates the idea of the Church. The first is wrong because the gospel, not the law, is the supreme power in the Church; the second is wrong because the Christian life as such is a life of "koinonia". It would seem that a deeper theological understanding, at once religious and realistic, of the original idea of the Church will help us to abandon both these misleading ways.

I have tried to say some words about the difficult question of the nature of the Church. Before I finish I am bound to express my gratitude towards the Church of England, because the idea of the Church lived a richer and fuller life in this Church than in most other Churches during a period when the consciousness of the Church mostly was very feeble, and also and not least because this Church of England has done more than any other Church for awakening anew the consciousness of the universal character of the Church of Christ.

And so I conclude. I have tried to show first that theology can be a help towards Christian unity, if it is conscious of its scientific purpose and strictly fulfils it; further, that theology in our days has passed a turning-point and that its present tendencies are hopeful for the sake of Christian unity. It has

been my endeavour to illustrate by some important examples in what ways theology can render its help. In conclusion it may once more be emphasized that the function of theology, from the point of view of Christian unity, is only to be a help and a servant. The real power for the unity that we so sorely need has a far deeper source. It comes from the God of mercy himself and from his Son Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

G. AULEN.